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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Letter dated 29 December 1995 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I hereby have the honour to inform you that, for the first time, multiparty presidential elections have been held in the Kyrgyz Republic. Of the total number of voters, 86.19 per cent took part. The incumbent President Askar Akayev garnered the overwhelming majority of the votes (71.59 per cent); the second candidate for the highest State office, the Kyrgyz communist leader Apsamat Masalievich Masaliev, took 24.42 per cent of the vote, and Medetkan Sherimkulov, the former speaker of parliament and the third presidential candidate, attracted just 1.72 per cent.

At the invitation of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) travelled to Kyrgyzstan to coordinate the work of international observers and to observe the election campaign and the conduct of the election itself. In this context, I have the honour to transmit the text of the statement by the UNDP/OSCE Joint Observer Mission regarding the results of the presidential election in the Kyrgyz Republic (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 112 (b).

(Signed) Askar AITMATOV
Chargé d'affaires, a.i. of the
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ANNEX

Statement of the OSCE/UNDP joint electoral observation mission in the Kyrgyz Republic

On 24 December 1995, the Kyrgyz Republic held its first multi-party presidential elections. Upon the invitation of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, representatives of the UNDP and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights arrived in Kyrgyzstan on 19 November and 3 December to coordinate a delegation of 37 international observers and monitor pre-election and election day activities. The delegation included observers from Canada, Denmark, Germany, Indonesia, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Two teams of two observers each were present in every oblast, with the exception of Naryn where there were a team of one and a team of two. In the city of Bishkek, there were seven teams present. The delegation included election experts, academics specializing in Central Asia, and government officials from member States.

The Joint Operation found that activities on election day itself were generally free and open. However, some legal and constitutional concerns were raised regarding the process of registering candidates and revoking their registration, and about the conduct of the election campaign. Eleven days before election day three of the six candidates had their registration revoked by the Supreme Court. Despite a continuation of "family voting" and some irregularities concerning control of the mobile ballot boxes and ballots, the overall results seem consistent with the will of the voters. For the most part, the Joint Operation found the presidential elections to be a step forward from the elections to the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) held in the Kyrgyz Republic earlier this year.

Approximately two thirds of the electorate turned out despite a snowstorm in much of the country. Voters did not encounter physical intimidation or other administrative obstacles which might have prevented them from participating in the process. The demographic profile of voters seemed skewed to the middle to older range, although younger voters did participate.

Polling sites were well marked and seemed easily accessible to voters. Polls opened on time and officials generally seemed to have organized the sites well. Officials controlled the electoral lists to check the identity of voters, issue ballots and allow voters to make their selections in private voting booths. Representatives of the candidates were present at most polling sites. For the most part, ballot boxes were clearly visible to representatives of the respective candidates, militiamen, electoral officials, and international observers.

Officials and voters seemed generally familiar with the physical procedures required for the process of casting a ballot. This is probably a by-product of experience and the high rate of literacy and a simplified selection process involving only one ballot (since the proposed referendums were cancelled). With exceptions in some cases during the late-morning "rush hour", voting went smoothly and with no noticeable delays or lines.

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The general atmosphere at the majority of sites international observers visited was calm and orderly. Some campaign materials, mainly posters, supporting one of the candidates were noticed at the entrances and inside of some polling stations. Once officials were informed of these violations, the materials were removed.

International observers found that in many cases, particularly in urban areas, as well as in Issyk Kol and Naryn oblasts, electoral officials refused to allow voters to cast ballots for family members; instead they suggested that those family members be brought to the polling station or have their names placed on the list for the mobile ballot box. Family voting, however, was prevalent in Talas, Chui, Dzalal-Abad, and Osh Oblasts, as well as in a number of sites in Bishkek.

There were varying impressions among international observers about the conduct of voting through mobile ballot boxes. For the most part international observers who accompanied mobile ballot boxes did not witness violations and were fairly confident of their security when the mobile boxes were accompanied by domestic observers. Concern arose, however, regarding the number of mobile ballot boxes per polling site and the potential use of the mobile ballot box to pressure people who had not voted at their polling site to do so at their place of residence.

International observers found at most polling sites a special list for voters not on the original voter lists. To be entered onto the supplemental list, a voter was required to present the "propiska" in his or her passport designating the place of residence. Though poll workers generally adhered to this requirement, in Bishkek, the presence of over 200-300 voters on supplemental lists in a few polling sites with 1,500-2,000 total voters raised concerns regarding the efficiency and the manner in which the original voter lists for this cycle were compiled.

The tabulation of ballots generally was carried out in an organized and efficient manner and without any efforts to manipulate either the results of the turnout. Ballot stuffing during the vote count, however, was observed at one site in the city of Talas. No similar violations were reported by any of the other international observers.

Although the teams in Talas reported polling site officials obstructing them from carrying out their observation, on the whole, international observers were received in a friendly, professional manner throughout the day.

The United Nations/OSCE Joint Electoral Mission was honoured to have shared this historic experience with the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic. We wish them well as they continue to build the institutions of a democratic society.

Bishkek
December 1995
United Nations/OSCE Joint Electoral Office